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## Reporters Committee Hotline provides free 24-hour legal aid to journalists covering the 2012 Republican National Convention

The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press has arranged with the media law firm of Thomas & LoCicero PL to coordinate *pro bono* legal assistance to reporters covering the 2012 Republican National Convention through a 24-hour hotline. Volunteer attorneys will be available to advise reporters who are arrested or experience other problems with law enforcement while covering the convention, the political protests or related events.

The hotline will be in operation from Friday, August 24, 2012 through the end of the convention. The phone numbers are **(813) 984-3076 or (813) 984-3078**. You may also call the regular hotline operated by the Reporters Committee at **(800) 336-4243**. The attorneys responding to calls will include Gregg Thomas, Carol LoCicero, Jim Lake, Jim McGuire, and Paul McAdoo.

**BE PREPARED.** Disturbances occurring at political conventions in the past sometimes have resulted in mass arrests during which reporters have been taken into custody. The hotline is part of the Reporters Committee's effort to address problems experienced by reporters as a result of undue restrictions on access or while covering demonstrations and other events occurring in and around Tampa during the Republican National Convention. This flier provides guidelines to follow in the event of a disturbance and provides our best information at the time it was prepared. This information is subject to change; for the most recent version, go to [www.rcfp.org/conventions](http://www.rcfp.org/conventions)

Always carry with you two forms of identification: (1) your convention credential, any police-issued press pass or other documentation (such as police-issued press passes from prior events or your employer-issued I.D.) of your status as a professional journalist, and (2) a government-issued photo identification card. If you are detained without a government-issued I.D., the police will hold you until you can be fingerprinted and positively identified, a process that can take several hours and makes you ineligible for immediate release on bond. **Also** carry cash with you (see "Arrest & Release" below).

Make it visually obvious you are a member of the press. Any journalist wearing a helmet during a protest should have the word "PRESS" prominently displayed on the helmet itself.

Indeed, it is advisable to always wear a hat and/or shirt that display the word "PRESS" prominently. If an event becomes the subject of law enforcement activity, the best way to avoid being arrested is to report on those activities in a manner that does not obstruct the law enforcement activity, and to follow all police orders. Do not walk through a police line without first showing your press pass and obtaining permission.

The City of Tampa has also passed a special "Event Zone" ordinance (Ordinance No. 2012-56 available at <http://docserver.tampagov.net/cache/00004/167/Ordinance%202012-56%20thru%202012-58.pdf>) which regulates a wide variety of issues in many areas of downtown Tampa. One restriction in the "Event Zone" itself is that gas masks are generally prohibited. In the more narrow "Public Viewing Area," things such as monopods, bipods, and tripods are technically prohibited. Please consult the ordinance itself and discuss any issues with your legal counsel to determine how you will respond to potential issues posed by the Event Zone ordinance.

**POLICE INFORMATION.** The Secret Service, FBI, Department of Homeland Security, Tampa Police Department, Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, Florida Highway Patrol, and other law enforcement agencies will all have a presence in and around convention-related locations, including the Tampa Bay Times Forum, Tampa Convention Center, other convention sites and the designated parade route and demonstration sites.

In the event of any incident between the media and the police, you should immediately call the hotline.

During the convention, Tampa will operate a Joint Information Center (JIC) to provide the media with "a convenient and responsive single point-of-contact for media inquiries related to public safety and security." The media information line for the JIC is (813) 274-NEWS (6397). (*note:* This telephone number has been established for the benefit of media representatives only, not for the public. Please do not publish or broadcast the number upon receipt of it.)

In the event of any incident between the media and the police, you should immediately call the hotline at **(813) 984-3076 or (813) 984-3078**.

- Carry with you, at all times, (1) your RNC-issued press credential, if applicable, or employer-issued I.D., (2) a government-issued photo I.D., and (3) cash (*to post bond if necessary; credit cards cannot be used to post bond*).
- If you are detained, (1) comply with police orders; (2) identify yourself as a member of the press; (3) ask the arresting officer to notify a supervisor or captain that a reporter is being detained; and (4) call the hotline.

**ACCESS.** Access to the Tampa Bay Times Forum, Tampa Convention Center and other convention-related sites, and particular areas within those sites, will be highly regulated. RNC-issued credentials are required to enter the forum and convention center. Do not expect to be permitted to enter any areas inside or in the vicinity of the convention sites or elsewhere that are closed by police for security reasons. And, again, do not walk through a police line without first showing your press pass and obtaining permission. Press credentials other than those issued by the RNC, *e.g.*, those issued by a city police department or city or state press association or other event, may be recognized in some places but not others. The City of Tampa has no plans to issue press credentials for the event.

**DETENTION.** In the event police detain you during a disturbance, remain calm and obey instructions. In addition, (1) notify the arresting officer that you are a news reporter and show your credentials; (2) ask that a supervisor or captain be notified that a reporter is being detained; and (3) seek permission to call the hotline attorney at your earliest opportunity. Local law enforcement agencies have advised their officers not to interfere with working journalists, provided the journalists do not commit separate infractions or interfere with police operations or safety. Identifying yourself as a news reporter may reduce the likelihood of arrest, and may facilitate your release if you are caught up in a mass arrest. If you are covering the activities of a crowd that invites arrest and want to avoid being arrested along with them, move to the periphery of the activity so you can readily detach yourself should that prove necessary.

**ARREST & RELEASE.** If you are arrested for disorderly conduct, unlawful assembly, disturbing the peace, failure to follow a police order, or any other non-felony infraction, *the quickest way to get back onto the streets to continue reporting is to politely let the booking personnel know you are a reporter, cooperate and, assuming bond is necessary, post bond.* You should be cooperative during this process, but remember that anything you say may be used against you. You will first be taken to a downtown transfer station for transportation to the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Orient Road Jail (1201 Orient Road, Tampa, FL 33619). Again, identify yourself to booking personnel as a journalist and ask to be processed quickly. If you're not processed on a priority basis, ask the booking personnel to contact the Public Information Officer for the Sheriff's Department.

If the booking personnel proceed with booking, a routine booking procedure will be conducted in which you will be fingerprinted, your photograph will be taken, and your identity will be verified. You should cooperate in giving your name, address, and other basic identifying information, but remember that other statements you make can and will be used against you in later proceedings. Again, identifying yourself as a reporter should expedite your processing.

Phones will be available for your use once your processing is complete. There are three possibilities as to what will happen next:

(1) If you do not have proof of your identity or refuse to provide it, you will likely stay at the Orient Road Jail and be detained until your identity is determined. This could substantially delay your release, so *be sure to carry your government-issued I.D. card at all times.*

(2) If you have provided proof of your identity and indicate you are able and willing to post the required bond to ensure your later appearance in court, after your identity is verified and you clear a criminal history check, you will remain at the Orient Road Jail where you will post your bond, receive a date for a future court appearance, and be released. The hotline has a copy of the bond schedule for specified offenses. Most municipal offenses with which reporters likely would be charged carry a \$250 bond, although the amount could be as high as \$500. *You should therefore carry with you, at all times, a minimum of \$250 and preferably \$500.* The Orient Road Jail is east of downtown off Highway 60. You will need a ride back to downtown Tampa. There is a bus stop near the jail. There is no ATM in the booking area, but there is an ATM in the Orient Road Jail lobby that you may be allowed to use if you do not have cash with you. Even if you receive permission to use this ATM, your processing will be delayed further.

(3) If you cannot or refuse to post bond, you will remain at the Orient Road Jail for your first appearance. The Orient Road Jail will be open as needed during the RNC and multiple first appearance sessions will be held daily. Arrestees may receive video advisements in groups concerning the maximum penalties and bond setting procedures. Then the arrestee will appear before a judge collectively. You have the right to have an attorney represent you at your first appearance, and you may call the hotline to request a volunteer attorney who can provide assistance in connection with your first appearance. The hotline will have access to volunteer criminal defense lawyers who may be able to assist you, depending on the timing of your first appearance and logistical issues. Volunteers from the National Lawyers Guild and similar organizations may also be present at the Orient Road Jail to assist you. The Hillsborough County Public Defender's Office will likely have staff attorneys on site.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.** When calling the hotline, please identify yourself as a journalist and state that you are calling the hotline. If you are taken into custody and unable to call the hotline, try to inform a colleague, employer or somebody else to contact the hotline on your behalf. You should call the hotline at your earliest opportunity thereafter, however, as the volunteer attorneys can be of little, if any, assistance before speaking with you.

Thomas & LoCicero PL will be glad to assist anyone who has a subsequent court appearance in finding an attorney, but representation at subsequent hearings is not part of the free hotline service.

The hotline should not be used for disputes over credentials or problems unrelated to your news coverage of the convention. You may call the Reporters Committee's regular hotline, **(800) 336-4243**, if you have other credentialing or access issues.

For police misconduct complaints: contact the Tampa Police Department Internal Affairs Bureau - 411 North Franklin Street, Tampa, FL 33602, (813) 274-5849; or the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, Internal Affairs - 2008 E. 8th Avenue, Tampa, FL 33605, (813) 247-8080.

If you have any questions or comments about the hotline, contact Gregg Thomas or Carol LoCicero at Thomas & LoCicero, (813) 984-3076 or (813) 984-3078; or Gregg Leslie, Legal Defense Director of the Reporters Committee, at (703) 807-2100.